

VZCZCXRO7429  
PP RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM  
DE RUEHCHI #0010/01 0150919  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P R 150919Z JAN 09  
FM AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0952  
INFO RUEHXS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC  
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1029

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CHIANG MAI 000010

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

NSC FOR PHU

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#)  
SUBJECT: IN NORTH, PRO-THAKSIN VOTE DROPS SHARPLY AS VOTES FOR  
DEMOCRATS RISE

REF: A. BANGKOK 79 (GOVERNING COALITION GAINS MODESTLY)  
[1](#)B. CHIANG MAI 4 (THAKSIN'S HEARTLAND MAY MOBILIZE)  
[1](#)C. CHIANG MAI 3 (REDSHIRTS FLEX)  
[1](#)D. 08 CHIANG MAI 178 (PRO AND ANTI-THAKSIN)  
[1](#)E. 08 CHIANG MAI 168 (POLITICAL TEMPERATURE)  
[1](#)F. 08 BANGKOK 3529 (THAI COURT DISSOLVES)

CHIANG MAI 00000010 001.2 OF 002

Sensitive but unclassified; please handle accordingly.

-----  
Summary and Comment  
-----

[1](#)1. (U) In January 11 by-elections in two northern constituencies, the Democrat Party (DP), the largest party in the new governing coalition, garnered over 40,000 more votes than it did in the 2007 national elections in the same two districts. Despite this increase, the pro-Thaksin Puea Thai Party (PT) lost only one of the two contested seats in these long-time Thaksin strongholds, though its own vote total dropped by about 82,000 when compared with the 2007 election results. Neither side called for a re-count or reported major irregularities. The Puea Thai candidate who lost has been a key organizer of pro-Thaksin "redshirt" protests in and around Chiang Mai. See Ref A for a recap of the nationwide results and their significance.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Comment: The results in the two races may indicate voter discontent with sometimes violent tactics of the north's pro-Thaksin redshirts (Refs C, D and E), including their intimidation of former Prime Minister and DP advisor Chuan Leekpai in Lampang the week before election day. It is also possible that the Democrat Party and its coalition partners had agreed beforehand not to run against each other in these and other constituencies. For instance, coalition partner Chat Thai Pattana did not contest the seat in Lamphun Province, whereas the DP did not contest seats in the Northeast. In addition, the court-ordered dissolution of the pro-Thaksin People's Power Party that necessitated the by-elections left pro-Thaksin forces without experienced candidates. Disarray at Puea Thai's top level and the resulting lack of a unified campaign strategy, as well as poor campaign organization, also hurt the party's candidates, a senior Puea Thai MP told us. End Summary and Comment.

-----  
DP Wins Handily in Lamphun  
-----

[1](#)3. (SBU) The by-election in Lamphun Province necessitated by the December 2008 dissolution of the then-governing, pro-Thaksin People's Power Party and two of its coalition partners (Ref F)

saw three key contenders enter the race for a seat that had been held by the PPP. These contenders were:

-- from Puea Thai (successor party to the PPP), the political newcomer Phetcharawat Wattanaphongsirikul, a key organizer of the Rak Chiang Mai 51 pro-Thaksin redshirt group (Ref D), and a person more closely connected with neighboring Chiang Mai Province than with Lamphun.

-- from the Democrat Party, a native son who previously had served as Lamphun's mayor and an elected member of Lamphun's Provincial Council.

-- from Puea Paen Din (whose members have currently split their loyalties between the Democrat Party and Puea Thai), a veteran politician who had represented Lamphun as an MP in former PM Thaksin's now-defunct Thai Rak Thai Party from 2001-06.

(Comment: According to a senior Puea Thai politician, this candidate is believed to have split the pro-Thaksin vote and possibly cost PT's Phetcharawat a victory).

14. (U) The race was not close. The Democrat Party's victorious candidate garnered over 102,000 votes, almost 15,000 more than the top DP vote-getter had received in the same race in 2007. Puea Thai's Phetcharawat finished second, with over 93,000 votes (about 42,000 less than the winning PPP candidate had received in 2007), and the Puea Paen Din candidate came in a distant third, with just over 17,000 votes. The Democrat Party's victory was a political comeback in that the pro-Thaksin party had won all three of the province's parliamentary seats in 2005 and 2007, after winning two to DP's one in the 2001 elections.

-----  
PT Holds Serve in Lampang  
-----

15. (U) Although it garnered some 40,000 votes less than the top  
CHIANG MAI 00000010 002.2 OF 002

PPP vote-getter in the 2007 election, Puea Thai held its seat in Lampang, where the pro-Thaksin party has swept all five of the province's seats in each of the last three elections since 2001. Despite the lack of experience of its 26-year-old candidate, PT secured over 107,000 votes. The Democrat Party candidate finished a close second with nearly 104,000 votes, a significant improvement over his own fourth-place showing in 2007 when he garnered just under 78,000 votes.

----- --  
Atmospherics and Afterthoughts  
----- --

16. (SBU) Taking the Lamphun and Lampang races together, the Democrat Party garnered over 41,000 votes more than its top vote-getters did in December 2007 in the same two constituencies. In comparison, Puea Thai's grand total was about 82,000 votes lower than in 2007. (Note: This despite the fact that total ballots cast in the two constituencies declined from about 562,000 in 2007 to 424,000 in 2009, when fewer candidates ran). According to local Election Commission officials, voter turn-out was 77% in Lamphun and 68% in Lampang, down from the corresponding 2007 figures of 89% and 73%. The Lampang Election Commission did not report receiving any complaints of irregularities. In Lamphun, written complaints submitted had to do with negative campaigning and the distribution of materials to voters, which an Election Commission official characterized as "not serious." We note, however, comments by an Election Commission official in the press on January 14 stating that the Commission was not yet prepared to certify the Lamphun and Lampang results, though it did certify results in 20 of the 29 by-election contests nationwide.

17. (SBU) Contacts close to senior Puea Thai figures told us that the party did not view the January by-elections as critical, as it expects the lower house of Parliament will be

dissolved in the not-too-distant future. This may explain why the party appears not to have put its entire machinery behind Phetcharawat in Lamphun. Another Lamphun contact opined that many pro-Thaksin voters felt "insulted" that Puea Thai fielded a candidate from outside the province, and therefore decided to "teach PT a lesson." Separately, an NGO contact in Lampang told us that the urban population and the well-educated in rural areas there want to see real change, and to move beyond the politics of red-yellow confrontation. These voters are hopeful that the Democrat Party-led coalition can bring this change about. (See Ref B for more on this theme).

18. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Bangkok.  
MORROW